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Thesis-Writing Stress and Coping Strategies among Islamic Guidance and Counseling Students: A Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT:
Background: Writing a thesis is an academic challenge that can be stressful for students, especially when they face difficulties in scientific writing, limited references, family demands, time management challenges, and anxiety during the mentoring process. These conditions can impact students' psychology and hinder their thesis completion.
Aims: This study aims to identify stress levels, stress-causing factors, and efforts made by Islamic Guidance and Counseling Study Program students of the 2020 intake in overcoming stress during the preparation of their thesis.
Methods: The study employed a qualitative approach with descriptive methods. The primary informants consisted of 10 students from a population of 51 students from the Class of 2020. The informants were selected purposively and information sources were developed through snowball sampling. Data were collected through participant observation, unstructured interviews, and documentation. They were then analyzed through data review, data reduction, data presentation, conclusion drawing, and verification. Data validity was strengthened through source triangulation.
Result: Of the 10 students, three experienced mild stress and seven experienced moderate stress. The causes of stress included internal factors, particularly poor time management, pessimism, and low self-confidence, as well as external factors such as a less conducive environment, limited resources, parental demands, work, and family responsibilities. Students coped with stress through general strategies such as relaxation, a healthy lifestyle, relaxation, time management, and discussions with friends. They also employed Islamic strategies such as prayer and prayer.
Conclusion: Thesis writing stress among Islamic Guidance and Counseling students is generally moderate and influenced by a combination of personal and environmental factors. Stress management is carried out through academic-psychological, social, and spiritual approaches, so student mentoring in completing their thesis needs to consider these aspects in an integrated manner.

Keywords: stress thesis; coping strategies; Islamic guidance and counseling; students

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INTRODUCTION

Writing a thesis is a crucial stage in undergraduate education because it requires students to integrate academic knowledge, research skills, independence, and scientific problem-solving skills. However, these demands can become a source of stress when students perceive their abilities or resources as inadequate to overcome the various challenges encountered during the thesis writing process (Hariaty et al., 2023; Kurniawati & Setyaningsih, 2022). According toMehmood et al., (2022) stress as a non-specific response of the body to the demands received, whereas according to McPherson, (2023) Stress is a relationship between an individual and the environment that is considered to burden or exceed an individual's resources and has the potential to threaten his or her well-being. In an academic context, this condition is important to pay attention to because stress can appear in mental, emotional, physical and behavioral aspects, including difficulty concentrating, anxiety, decreased self-confidence, fatigue, moodiness, and even social withdrawal (Aulya, 2025; Sadiyah et al., 2024). Therefore, stress in writing a thesis is not only a matter of completing academic tasks, but also relates to the student's ability to maintain psychological functioning and complete their studies.

Ideally, students in the final stages of their studies are expected to be able to complete their thesis independently and systematically, utilizing the competencies they have acquired during their studies. A thesis is even considered a requirement for undergraduate studies and a means of developing students' scientific problem-solving skills. However, the empirical situation of Islamic Guidance and Counseling students in the Class of 2020 indicates a gap between this ideal and the reality they face. Initial observations revealed various difficulties, including defining research problems and titles, understanding scientific writing, obtaining appropriate references, and meeting with supervisors. The thesis writing process was also deemed draining on energy, time, money, and thought, leading some students to postpone their thesis work, feel a lack of confidence, and even exhibit emotional distress. This situation is even more critical because of the 51 Islamic Guidance and Counseling students in the Class of 2020, at the initial observation, only 10 had completed a proposal seminar, while the other 41 had not yet completed one as the class was already in its eighth semester and heading into its ninth semester.

This situation opens up an important opportunity to examine the stress of writing a thesis not only as a psychological experience for students, but also from the perspective of how students actively respond to and overcome it. The problems identified are not rooted in a single source of stress. Students face difficulties obtaining references and developing their writing, repeated revisions, anxiety when interacting with their supervisors, family pressure to graduate quickly, limited time management, and other obligations such as work or caring for parents.(Kusaini et al., 2024; Silviani et al., 2023)The context of the Islamic Guidance and Counseling Study Program also provides a more specific analytical space because stress management can be achieved through both general strategies and approaches based on Islamic practices. In the research paper, stress management is defined as students' efforts to cope with the pressure of writing a thesis through both general and Islamic methods. Therefore, research in this context has the potential to provide a more contextualized picture of how students cope with academic pressure while utilizing personal, social, and religious resources.

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A number of previous studies have discussed student stress during thesis writing, but their focus still shows room for development. Mufatihah et al., (2025) describes the stress, symptoms, and internal and external factors experienced by a student when his thesis is not finished. Meanwhile, according to research Mirza et al., (2023) This study examines students' stress coping strategies in writing their thesis specifically. Thus, there is still a gap for an integrated study of stress levels, causal factors, and especially the forms of student efforts to overcome them in the normal context of writing a thesis for Islamic Guidance and Counseling students. The novelty of this study lies in exploring efforts to overcome stress by bringing together general strategies and Islamic strategies in the context of Islamic Guidance and Counseling students of the Class of 2020 at the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication Sciences, UIN Syekh Ali Hasan Ahmad Addary Padangsidimpuan.

The focus on students' efforts to cope with stress was chosen because responses to academic pressure are determined not only by the presence of stressors but also by how individuals assess and respond to those demands. The appraisal process plays a crucial role in determining the extent of stress when individuals face situations perceived as threatening, so it is important to understand the relationship between the individual and the source of stress, along with the responses developed to address them (Setyanta et al., 2025; Suryadi & Aslan, 2025). In the context of this research, the focus on stress management efforts allows for the identification of concrete actions used by students to maintain their ability to complete their thesis. The original manuscript places these efforts in two domains: general strategies such as relaxation, maintaining a healthy lifestyle, refreshing, managing time, and discussing with friends, and Islamic strategies through prayer and supplication. This choice of focus is also relevant to the character of the Islamic Guidance and Counseling Study Program because it allows for an understanding of the relationship between personal-social stress management mechanisms and religious practices in dealing with academic pressure.

Based on these research problems and gaps, this study aims to identify the stress levels of Islamic Guidance and Counseling students in the Class of 2020 in writing their theses, analyze the factors that cause stress, and explore the efforts made by students in coping with stress during the thesis writing process. These three objectives are the main focus established in the original research. Theoretically, this research is expected to enrich the study of academic stress and student responses in the context of completing final assignments, especially in Islamic Guidance and Counseling education. Practically, the research findings are expected to provide students with an understanding of alternative stress management and provide input for the Islamic Guidance and Counseling Study Program and the academic environment in providing more appropriate support to students completing their theses. This contribution is in line with the benefits of the research in the original manuscript which is directed at developing knowledge regarding efforts to overcome stress and the development of Islamic Guidance and Counseling science.

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METHOD

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive design to explore students' experiences of stress during the preparation of their thesis and the efforts they make to overcome it. This approach was chosen because the study seeks to understand the phenomenon based on the experiences and perspectives of informants in its natural context, rather than statistically testing relationships between variables. Specifically, the study describes the forms and levels of stress experienced by students, the factors that trigger it, and the strategies used to overcome it, including general strategies and Islamic approaches.

Participant

The primary participants of the study were 10 students from the Islamic Guidance and Counseling Study Program, Class of 2020, Faculty of Da'wah and Communication Sciences, Syekh Ali Hasan Ahmad Addary State Islamic University, Padangsidimpuan, who were writing their theses and experiencing stress during the process. As supporting sources of information, the study also involved three close friends and two roommates to provide additional information regarding the students' behavior, complaints, and coping strategies. The methods paper also mentions fellow advisors deemed capable and willing to provide information, but the number of these is not explicitly stated.

Population and Sampling/Instrumentation

The study population included 51 Islamic Guidance and Counseling students from the Class of 2020. The original manuscript mentioned the use of purposive sampling based on certain characteristics, namely students from the Class of 2020 who experienced stress while writing their theses and were willing to provide information. Furthermore, the manuscript also stated the use of snowball sampling, where initial informants helped identify other informants relevant to the research focus. Thus, for the purpose of presenting this article, this process can be explained as a purposive selection of initial informants followed by snowball referrals. A total of 10 students ultimately became the primary data sources.

Instrument

The primary instrument in this qualitative research was the researcher, supported by observation guidelines, interview guidelines, and documentation. Observations were conducted in a participatory manner to identify stress symptoms through behavior, apparent psychological conditions, and student complaints during the thesis writing process. The interviews, as described in the methodology section, were unstructured interviews based on question guidelines, allowing for the development of key questions during the interviews to obtain more in-depth information. Documentation included photographs of the research process and relevant data from the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication Sciences. The observation guidelines specifically addressed students experiencing stress during the preparation of proposals and theses, and their efforts to overcome it in both general and Islamic perspectives.

Procedures and Time Frame

The research was conducted at the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication Sciences, Syekh Ali Hasan Ahmad Addary State Islamic University, Padangsidimpuan, from February 2024 to March 2025. The research began by identifying students who met the informant characteristics, then developing information sources using the snowball technique. Further data were collected through participant observation of students' stress conditions and symptoms, face-to-face interviews using

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interview guidelines that could be developed based on informant responses, and documentation to support field findings. Information from students was then compared with statements from friends or close associates as part of source triangulation.

Analysis Plan

Data were analyzed using descriptive qualitative analysis in four stages. First, all data from observations, interviews, and documentation were reviewed and recorded based on the research focus. Second, data reduction was performed by summarizing, selecting important information, focusing data on the research focus, and identifying relevant themes. Third, the reduced data were presented in descriptive narrative form. Fourth, conclusions were drawn and verified to obtain key patterns and findings regarding stress, its causes, and students' efforts to overcome it. The credibility of the findings was strengthened through triangulation by comparing the results of observations and interviews and comparing information between informants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

The results of the study showed that all 10 Islamic Guidance and Counseling students from the 2020 intake who served as key informants experienced stress during the thesis writing process, but at varying levels. Three students experienced mild stress, while seven students experienced moderate stress. Therefore, moderate stress was the most common condition among the research informants. The data in the original manuscript categorizes students into these two categories, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Student stress levels in writing a thesis

Stress Level	Number of Students (n)	Percentage	Main characteristics
Mild stress	3	30%	Pressure or tension lasts relatively short and mainly appears when working on a thesis or facing the guidance process.
Moderate Stress	7	70%	The pressure lasts longer, accompanied by fatigue, anxiety, and a tendency to delay writing the thesis.
Total	10	100%	

Note: percentages are calculated based on 10 key research informants.

In students with mild stress, the pressure is primarily evident in the form of complaints after supervision, tension when meeting with the supervisor, fear that the writing will not align with the supervisor's instructions, low self-confidence, and difficulty using technology and composing scientific papers. These conditions tend to last for a relatively short time, ranging from a few minutes to a few hours. In contrast, students with moderate stress exhibit more persistent stress and impact the completion of the thesis. Symptoms found include headaches, confusion, fatigue, boredom, anxiety, crying, lack of sleep, difficulty concentrating, and a tendency to postpone thesis work or supervision for several days.

Further findings indicate that stressors can be grouped into internal and external factors. Internal factors primarily include poor time management and the emergence of pessimism or a lack of self-confidence. Difficulty managing time occurs when students must juggle their thesis work with other activities, such as work, exercise, or caring for a sick parent. Meanwhile, pessimism arises when

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students doubt their academic abilities, fear making mistakes during tutoring, or feel inadequate in operating a computer to support their thesis writing. These conditions make it difficult for students to prioritize and maintain consistency in completing their final assignments.

External factors primarily relate to an unsupportive environment and limited learning resources. Several students reported that crowded living conditions or boarding houses interfered with concentration when writing their theses. Limited references, such as relevant books and journals, also hampered the writing process and increased student anxiety. Interview findings also revealed other pressures, such as parental pressure to graduate quickly, limited facilities such as not having a laptop, work demands and tuition fees, and difficulty obtaining appropriate references. These pressures not only caused psychological discomfort but, for some students, were also associated with delays in the completion of their thesis.

In dealing with stress, students used both general and Islamic strategies. Overall, field findings specifically indicated the adoption of healthy and refreshing lifestyles. Two students maintained their diet, sleep schedule, and water consumption, as well as engaging in sports activities such as gym and futsal. The other two students refreshed themselves by going for walks or visiting tourist attractions to reduce boredom before returning to their thesis work. The final research summary also noted relaxation, time management, and discussions with friends as common efforts. Meanwhile, Islamic strategies included prayer and supplication. Six students were recorded as using prayer as a way to calm down and regain concentration, while all 10 students used prayer as a way to cope with the difficulties of writing their thesis. Students described both practices as helping to provide a sense of calm, reduce tension during supervision, and rebuild the motivation to continue working on their thesis.

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Discussion

The research findings indicate that all informants experienced stress during the thesis writing process, with 7 out of 10 students experiencing moderate stress, while 3 students experienced mild stress. This condition indicates that thesis writing is perceived as a fairly burdensome academic demand, especially when students face difficulties in composing scientific papers, limited references, fear of facing guidance, and doubts about their own abilities. These findings are in line with the concept of stress, which explains stress as a non-specific body response to demands received by an individual (Febri, 2024; Levani et al., 2020; Lumban Gaol, 2016). Thus, differences in stress levels among students can be understood as a consequence of differences in assessing and responding to the demands of writing a thesis.

The stress-causing factors found reinforce the view that stress does not solely originate from academic demands, but is the result of interactions between personal and environmental factors (Adamopoulos & Syrou, 2022; Lukan et al., 2022). Internal factors such as poor time management, pessimism, and low self-confidence cause students to feel less capable of facing the demands of writing a thesis. Meanwhile, external factors such as an unfavorable living environment, limited references, parental demands, work, limited facilities, and the responsibility of caring for parents add to the burden faced by students. This finding is consistent with research theory which states that stressors can originate from the individual themselves, particularly role and responsibility conflicts, as well as from the environment and social relationships (Febriantina et al., 2025; Godeberta et al., 2023). This pressure has the potential to produce stress when students perceive that the demands they face require more resources than their available capabilities.

Further findings indicate that students are not passive in the face of stress, but develop various strategies to maintain their ability to complete their theses. Common strategies include maintaining a healthy lifestyle, relaxing, managing time, relaxing, and discussing with friends (Ghodeshwar et al., 2023; Kip & Parr-Brownlie, 2023). This type of response can be understood as an individual's attempt to adapt to demands perceived as burdensome by managing personal and social resources. A healthy lifestyle helps students maintain their physical condition, while recreational activities help reduce boredom, allowing them to return to their thesis work in a calmer state. Research findings even show that students who engage in relaxation activities report reduced mental stress and increased enthusiasm for continuing their thesis work.

The aspect that is an important characteristic of this research is the use of Islamic strategies in the form of prayer and supplication in dealing with the stress of writing a thesis (Izah et al., 2023; Rahmah et al., 2025). Six students used prayer as a way to gain peace and restore concentration, while all informants prayed when facing difficulties during their thesis writing. Students described that prayer helped reduce tension, anxiety, and fear, while prayer provided a sense of calm and confidence to return to the revision and guidance process. These findings indicate that among Islamic Guidance and Counseling students, efforts to cope with stress not only occur through physical, psychological, and social management, but also through spiritual resources. Thus, the process of coping with the stress of writing a thesis in the context of this study can be understood as a combination of general strategies and religious approaches that help students gain peace and maintain motivation to complete their academic tasks.

Implications

Research findings indicate the importance of academic support that focuses not only on the technical skills of thesis writing but also on students' psychological and spiritual preparedness. Study programs can strengthen student mentoring through thesis writing consultations, time management, peer support, and strengthening religious approaches consistent with the characteristics of Islamic Counseling Guidance.

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Research Contribution

This study contributes by demonstrating that the stress of writing a thesis is influenced by a combination of internal and external factors and is responded to through general and Islamic strategies. Its particular contribution lies in its description of the use of prayer and communal prayer, along with a healthy lifestyle, relaxation, time management, and social support in dealing with academic stress among Islamic Guidance and Counseling students.

Limitations

This study was limited to 10 Islamic Guidance and Counseling students from the 2020 intake at a single institution, so the findings are not intended to be generalized to all students. The original manuscript also noted limitations such as some informants feeling embarrassed during interviews, limited exploration of theories and sources of information, limited time spent with informants, and a suboptimal approach to exploring the phenomenon in greater depth.

Suggestions

It is recommended that future research involve students from a wider range of study programs or universities and explore the relationship between stress sources, stress management strategies, social support, and religious practices in greater depth. A more in-depth qualitative approach or mixed-study design could also be considered to more comprehensively analyze students' experiences and stress level trends.

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CONCLUSION

This study shows that students in the Islamic Guidance and Counseling Study Program, Class of 2020, experienced varying levels of stress during the thesis writing process. Of the 10 key informants, three students experienced mild stress and seven students experienced moderate stress. This stress was influenced by internal factors, particularly poor time management, pessimism, and low self-confidence, as well as external factors such as a less conducive environment, limited references, parental demands, work, limited facilities, and family responsibilities. These conditions resulted in anxiety, fatigue, headaches, difficulty concentrating, boredom, and a tendency to procrastinate on thesis writing.

To cope with stress, students use a combination of general and Islamic strategies. General strategies include relaxation, a healthy lifestyle, refreshing, time management, and discussions with friends, while Islamic strategies involve prayer and so on. These findings indicate that managing the stress of writing a thesis among Islamic Guidance and Counseling students relies not only on managing academic and psychological aspects but also involves social and spiritual resources. Therefore, support for students writing a thesis should be directed towards a more comprehensive approach that simultaneously addresses academic, psychological, social, and religious needs.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

DKD contributed to the conceptualization of the study, data collection, data analysis, and manuscript preparation. RS contributed to the supervision, validation, and review of the research methodology. CH contributed to the analysis, refinement of the interpretation of the results, and review and revision of the manuscript. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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